

RIGHT: Airman 1st Class Dewesely Williams, a survival equipment apprentice assigned to the 60th EMS, inspects and adjusts the rigging of a personnel restraint kit.

BELOW: Senior Airman Dan Damons, a survival equipment journeyman assigned to the 60th EMS, repairs a handle on an aircraft slide kit.



Photos by Tech. Sgt. Jim Verchio / 60th AMW Public Affairs

SURVIVAL

Travis airmen help keep aircrews, passengers safe

By Tech. Sgt. Scott King
60 AMW Public Affairs

C-5s from Travis travel 2,000 miles to Elmendorf Air Force Base, Alaska, 2,113 miles to Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii, 5,044 miles to Anderson Air Force Base, Guam, and more than 5,200 miles to locations in Japan — in the middle of the ocean, hours away from any land, the pilots, crews and passengers can only hope the life-saving equipment on board is in working condition.

That's where the 60th Equipment Maintenance Squadron survival equipment section plays a vital role — a life saving role. They are responsible for inspecting, repairing and certifying the serviceability of the survival equipment on board these monster flying machines.

"Our main mission is to provide C-5 crews and passengers with lifesaving equipment in the event of a ground or in-flight emergency," said Tech. Sgt. Clifford Clemons, assistant NCOIC for the survival equipment section. "It's an important business we're in. If we don't do the job right the first time, people's lives could be at stake. That's something we take very seriously."

The shop unpacks, inspects, repairs and repacks 210 life rafts, 210 escape slides and more than 5,000 crew and passenger life preservers every year for the C-5s here. They also inspect and repair the insulation that blankets the

entire C-5 interior, make and replace crew and troop movement matted floors, maintain infant cots and repair anti-exposure flight suits for crews who are flying over arctic waters.

The shop rarely gets to rest as the volumes of items in need of repair and replacement work their way through their doors.

"To say we're busy is an understatement," Clemons said. "We have to render 20 life rafts and nine escape suits serviceable before Christmas — it's no easy task, but we're up to the job."

Clemons hopes none of the Travis C-5 crews and passengers ever have the need to use his equipment, but he acknowledges it has happened to him before.

"During the Gulf War, while I was stationed in the United Arab Emirates, an F-16 pilot, wearing one of the parachutes I packed, had to eject when a surface-to-air missile illuminated his radar — thankfully it opened and saved the pilot's life," he said. "We're their last chance for survival in an emergency."

A lot of the work the shop does involves patching holes in the rafts and slides, but fabric work

also plays an important role. They routinely sew up the insulation blankets found throughout the C-5 as well as repair interior straps and crew bunks through "needlework."

"People are surprised when they hear I went through four years of schooling and on-the-job-training to do this kind of work," said fabric worker Teresa Helsel, a 12-year native of Travis. "We have to know physics and math, just to name a few, so we can decipher blueprints and other forms of designs allowing us to manufac-

ture items. We also have to be pretty creative to engineer the products our customers request. It's a great way to pass the day, and an important role we play here."

The bottom line for the survival equipment shop is perfection.

"Our line of work is very important," said Senior Airman Dan Damons, survival equipment specialist. "The equipment we work on is vital to the safety of the crew and passengers. It's the kind of stuff aircrews never want to use, but if the time ever comes, it's some of the most important."



Staff Sgt. Chris Barletta makes repairs to a smoke goggle pouch.